

# stamping lifestyle

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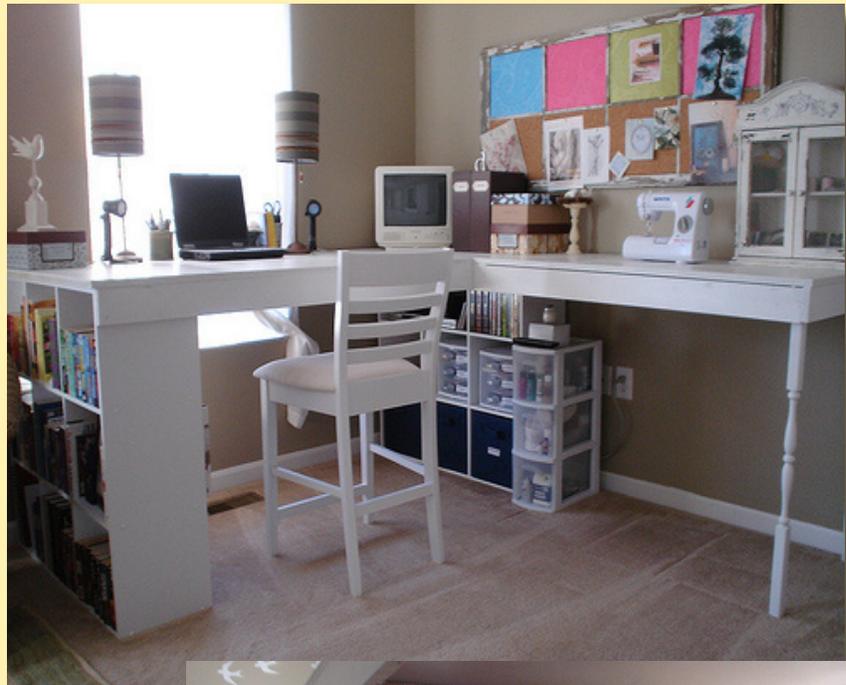
August 22, 2009

**Crafting can  
be a pain!**

*Stretches that  
feel great*

**Ergonomic tools  
that help with  
carpal tunnel  
syndrome**

*Advice from  
Jennifer Tapler -  
Physical Therapist &  
Athletic Trainer*



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# Crafting can be a pain!

by Lynn Mercurio

We crafters have many things on our plates. We have learned to be effective at multi-tasking. We successfully balance home, work, health, family and friends, and still find the energy and time to pursue our passion of crafting. To get optimal use of our time, we often find ourselves multitasking to save a minute here or there. What a joy it would be if we could actually squeeze EVERYTHING we wanted to do into our daily schedules, but sadly, there are only so many hours in the day. We find that we have to forgo some tasks we just don't have time to complete, and often it's our workout routine that gets pushed aside. It would be a dream come true if we could combine our craft time with our daily workout, but there isn't a cardiovascular workout you can do while stamping, unless you consider running back and forth between the laundry room and your stamp table an aerobic activity. There are some activities that you CAN do while stamping and scrapbooking that will help strengthen and stretch those body parts most used and commonly prone to injury.

Proper body mechanics isn't something we think about when crafting, but we should because the way we stand and sit can cause strain and injury. You may be saying, "but I'm not hurting anywhere"; however, many people who develop overuse injuries aren't aware of the strain that repetitive tasks and poor posture can cause until the pain begins, and by that time the damage is done. While there are events that cause acute injuries, (Who hasn't cut themselves with a craft knife?) the majority of injuries are from overuse. For paper crafters, the body parts that are most susceptible to such injuries involve the hands, wrists, elbow, neck and back. Muscles, tendons, bursa, bone, cartilage and nerves can all suffer the effects of repetitive movements. The good news is that 100% of true overuse injuries are preventable. Strength and flexibility are two key components for injury prevention, especially overuse injuries. Try a few of the following activities to keep you in the pink and pain free.

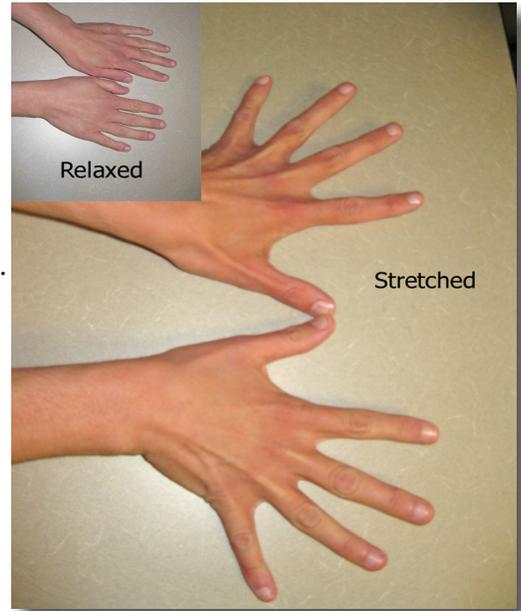
**\* It's highly recommended that before doing any exercises or stretches, to check with your doctor to make sure you are healthy enough for exercise.**

## Hands & Wrists

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a term that spreads fear and panic, especially in paper crafters whose hands ARE the most required tool of the trade. But did you know that repetitive actions such as the gripping required for prolonged cutting or use of a hobby blade can bring on, or enflame, this condition? Remember those last 50 swap cards you made? The repetitive action associated with preparing massive quantities of the same design is very stressful on the small ligaments and tendons of the wrist and hands. The best prevention for overuse is taking frequent breaks. Avoid doing the same task for more than 15 minutes without taking a break to allow your hands to rest.

Do a few wrist circles and stretch out your fingers for a few minutes, then move onto a different task before returning to the first one.

If you already have Carpal Tunnel or suffer from arthritis, more ergonomic tools will help alleviate the stress to your hands, such as ergonomic scissors and attachments for pens/markers.



In addition to using more ergonomic tools, learn to use your existing tools in such a way to exert less stress on the fingers and wrists.

## How?

Jennifer Tapler, Physical Therapist and Athletic Trainer by day and crafter by night, offers some advice. She states that punches can be especially problematic for people with arthritis, carpal tunnel or overuse injuries, so she recommends learning new ways to use the punch. Place the punch on the table, stand up and, with locked arms, lean your body into the punch to provide the necessary force, rather than using pure finger/hand strength. The more force you can distribute across larger joints (elbow, shoulder, and back), the less force is placed on the smaller joints in your fingers and wrists.

Next on the list of possible injury sites are the elbows. Lateral Epicondylitis, also known as "tennis elbow", is often experienced by crafters – even if you don't play tennis. If you have ever suffered from this problem, you know the pain it can cause and the motion limitations it presents. Once again, cutting or gripping can be the instigator in this injury. Jen recommends frequent breaks, and adding a few wrist extensor stretches. These stretches can be done standing or seated.

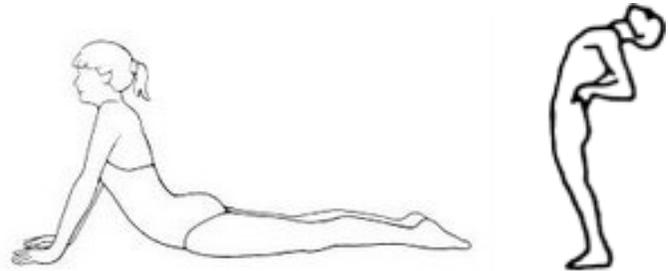


Hold your arm out in front of you with your elbow straight, and bend your wrist down with your fingers pointing towards the ground and give gentle overpressure with your other hand. If done correctly, you should feel the muscles on the top of your forearm stretch. Hold each stretch 15-20 seconds, and never stretch to the point of pain, but only to the point where you begin to feel the stretch.

The human body is an amazing creation with all parts interconnected in one way or another. The arm bone's connected to the shoulder bone, and the shoulder bone's connected to the back-bone, and the back bone (more specifically the muscles that surround the spine) is next on our list of hot spots to watch. Sitting for prolonged period of time can really do a number on your back, especially as we slouch forward over our work. Frequent breaks are VERY important to prevent the onset of back pain or to help alleviate existing back pain.

Sitting up straight every few minutes is recommended – this is easy to do, but we often forget about its importance. Jen recommends not sitting more than 30 minutes without a break and at the very least, sit up tall every 10 minutes. Additionally, having a good supportive chair with lumbar (low back) support is highly recommended for proper alignment while seated. If needed, you can place a pillow in the small of your back, which will help support your spine.

To help stretch this area, Jennifer supplied two photographs of the same type of stretch; one lying down and one standing. They are basically the same activity, just done in different positions. If you tend to lose your balance easily, the floor version may be the better stretch option for you.



Standing for long periods of time can be just as tiring on your low back as sitting, so if you are standing in one place for an extended amount of time, try to take a little strain off your lower back by elevating one foot on a box or low footrest. Change the foot you place on the box/rest frequently.

Traveling up the spine to the neck, we come to the most problematic area for paper crafters. Slouching over your work with your chin pushed forward places uneven pressure on your inter vertebral discs, which can cause fatigue and possibly strain the small muscles of the neck.

To help reduce the fatigue and stress, once again, frequent breaks can do a world of good. Also try a few chin tucks. Sitting up straight, pull your chin back without tilting your head. Two or three chin tucks should relieve the stress so that you can continue with your work.



Now that we have covered a few stretches for problem areas most likely to cause us pain, there are a couple of activities that you can do which can help strengthen muscles important for posture and stability. These activities can be done during those much needed breaks discussed earlier, or actually anytime you think of it.

While you are waiting for stickles or water coloring to dry, take a few minutes to help strengthen those muscles we sit on. Done while either standing or seated, try a few isometric gluteal contractions, a/k/a butt squeezes. The gluteal muscles are some of the strongest in our body, but that doesn't mean that they don't require attention to maintain strength. To help firm and strengthen this important stabilizing muscle group, squeeze tight and hold for a count of 5, release and repeat several times, or until your stickles are dry. Doing a few of these each time you find yourself waiting will help strengthen muscles that assist in standing, and promote a firmer, nicely rounded derrière.

Another strengthening activity that can be done anywhere and at any time you are seated: abdominal braces. These are done by sitting up tall with good posture, pull in your stomach muscles - it's the same move done when trying to button those tight jeans. Except this time, pull in and hold until you can't hold any longer, relax for a second, then repeat as many times as you can. While this activity won't produce those 6-pack abs, this isometric type activity is quite effective in improving muscle strength in those muscles that support the back. Just remember to breathe...never hold your breath while doing any type of exercise – those muscles need oxygen to work properly.

We not suggesting a substitute for your daily workout routine, but paying attention to your posture, frequent breaks and adding few stretches will go a long way to help avoid some of the common causes of overuse injuries that may sideline your crafting. Try a new type of multi-tasking by incorporating some of the stretches and strengthening activities outlined here during your next extended crafting session.

**The ergonomic tools shown in this article can purchased at Amazon.com.**



**Products like ergonomic chairs, back rests and foot rests can be purchased at your local office supply store or online at stores like [sitcorrect.com](http://sitcorrect.com).**